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SUBJECT: "75" DINNER IN SLOVAKIA: NGOS POUNCE ON SPANISH
AMBASSADOR, RECOMMEND EU RESTORE SANCTIONS

REF: HAVANA 5949

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (SBU) On March 16, Ambassador hosted a "Black Spring" dinner commemorating the March 18, 2003 arrests of 75 Cuban dissidents. In addition to former chairman of parliament Pavol Hrusovsky and parliamentary human rights committee chairman Laszlo Nagy (both of whom have visited Miami's Cuban dissident community), representatives from Slovak NGOs active in Cuba -- including the Pontis Foundation, People in Peril, and the Central European office of the International Republican Institute -- were forceful in their insistence that Europe's rapprochement to the Castro regime has failed the Cuban people, specifically referencing a record number of human rights violations in 2005. Spanish Ambassador to Slovakia Miguel Aguirre de Carcer allowed that the situation in Cuba "has not improved" since EU sanctions were lifted, but questioned whether the GOC's oppression of human rights activists had actually become worse in the interim. We used the occasion to emphasize to the Slovak politicians the need for continued Slovak activism on transformational diplomacy issues like Belarus and Cuba regardless of who runs the Slovak government after the June 17 elections.

GOS MAY FAVOR JOINT EU-US APPROACH

12. (C) Slovak MFA Deputy Director for Americas Viera Viskupova said that the Slovak Embassy in Havana continues to experience significant difficulties, as it finds itself trying to maintain relations with both the Castro government and dissidents. MFA Director for Common Foreign and Security Policy Anna Turenicova told guests that the difficulty for Slovakia is the need for a common EU policy formed by consensus, which incorporates both the Spanish desire for economic engagement as well as the harder line pushed by Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Viskupova said that policies such as this are most effective when the U.S. and EU have a common position. All agreed that the June re-examination of the position on Cuba would be crucial.

13. (C) The MFA will host a Cuba round-table in advance of the June EU - Latin America Summit in Vienna. The GOS believes that the EU needs to work more with Latin American countries on Cuba in recognition that Venezuelan oil is propping up Castro.

SLOVAKIA AND SPAIN AT DIFFERENT ENDS OF THE CUBA SPECTRUM

14. (C) The NGO representatives were universal in their praise for the actions of Slovak MPs who have adopted the families of imprisoned dissidents and repeatedly demonstrated a hard-line stance towards the Castro regime. They

emphasized that Slovak citizens feel strongly about Cuba because Slovaks lived under similar conditions. They stressed the need to train dissidents in economics, management, NGO organization, etc., to help stave off chaos when there is finally a change in the regime. Based on the reactions of our dinner guests, Slovakia will likely advocate for a more punitive position in its relationship with Castro's government.

POLITICAL NOTE: NEED FOR DEMOCRACY PROMOTION DEEPLY FELT

15. (C) The dinner provided a fascinating opportunity to hear Hrusovsky, leader of the Christian Democratic Party (KDH), present his views on democracy promotion abroad. Hrusovsky was quite eloquent on this subject from a moral perspective, and his commitment is deeply felt. Laszlo Nagy's credentials in this regard are impeccable, as evidenced by his tough anti-Lukashenko regime public remarks as an observer of the Belarus elections, for which he departed the morning after the March 16 event.

COMMENT: CUBAN RETRIBUTION IN BRATISLAVA?

16. (SBU) The Embassy Poloff who covers the Cuba portfolio -- and who organized the "75" dinner in cooperation with the Pontis Foundation -- was informed March 17 (the day after the dinner) that his request for a tourist visa for a personal trip to Havana to visit friends at USINT had been denied by MINREX. We speculate that Poloff's Cuba-related activities may have contributed to the GOC's decision.
VALLEE